
Open Burning Guide for Individual Property Owners

Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources

What materials are individual property owners allowed to burn outdoors?

- Where not prohibited by local ordinance, leaf burning and burning of plant clippings and brush is allowed anywhere in the state, as long as weather conditions do not pose a fire hazard.



However, leaf burning is discouraged because of the air pollution it causes and because of the

benefits of composting and mulching with these materials.

- Individual homeowners may burn small quantities of dry combustible rubbish such as paper, cardboard and/or clean untreated wood. Again, local ordinance can override this allowance. This is especially true in populated areas such as southeastern Wisconsin, where most municipalities have banned or severely limited open burning. Paper and cardboard can now be recycled in all communities, and recycling is the best disposal method for these items.

In either case, be sure to contact your local fire authority before you start burning to find out if you need to obtain a burning permit.

What kinds of materials MAY NOT be burned by individual property owners?

The administrative rules of the Air Management and Solid Waste Management Programs prohibit anyone from burning any of the following materials under any conditions:

- wet, combustible rubbish, such as wet cardboard or paper
- oily substances, such as oily or greasy rags, oil filters, etc.
- asphalt, such as asphalt shingles or tar paper
- plastics of any kind, including plastic bottles and plastic bags
- rubber products, including tires and hoses

These prohibitions apply to individual property owners (or renters) as well as to business and industry.

What can individuals do instead of burning household and yard wastes?

Instead of burning, the DNR recommends that you:

- **Reduce** usage--buy in bulk or larger quantities and demand less packaging on the products you buy.
- **Reuse** items--find someone else who can use it, have a yard sale, or donate it to a resale organization.
- **Recycle** newspaper, office paper, cardboard, corrugated cardboard, magazines, aluminum, metal and acceptable plastics.
- **Compost** leaves and plant clippings. Consult DNR district or area staff, University of Wisconsin-Extension and your local government to find out whether local ordinances allow you to compost raw vegetables, bread, egg shells and coffee grounds.
- **Chip** brush and clean wood to make mulch or decorative chips, or use it as heating fuel in wood stoves or boilers.
- **Dispose** of allowable waste materials at a licensed landfill. For more information about what items may be disposed of at licensed landfills, contact the Recycling Program at your DNR district or area office.